

## Women in Mine Action: UNMAS Field Case Studies

October 2017

### Libya: Gender-based Small Arms and Light Weapons Awareness Raising for Safer and More Resilient Communities

#### **The Challenge**

Following the 2011 revolution and the continued armed conflict, Libya has been recognized as having the largest unsecured arms and ammunition stockpiles in the world. The widespread availability of small arms and light weapons (SALW) poses remarkable security risks, playing a particularly detrimental role for the safety of civilians and local communities. Exact figures on the extent of SALW proliferation in Libya cannot be produced due to ongoing unrest and the ensuing inability to systematically enforce SALW control measures. However, a generally accepted estimation highlights that three SALW per person are currently available in Libya.



Contrary to United Nations Security Council resolutions in support of the role of women in peace and security, Libyan women have been marginally involved in the country's peacebuilding process, although their traditional role in society can make them more vulnerable to violence at a community and household level. In particular, women have globally been found to be several times more likely to be victims than perpetrators of small arms-related violence, and to be disproportionately affected by the misuse of small arms.

#### **The Project**

UNMAS Libya launched Phase 1 of the project in 2015, engaging a group of 12 female members of civil society from different areas of Libya. Between 2015 and 2016, the group was engaged in 3 educational workshops, receiving training in SALW risk and control measures in Tunis and Geneva from UNMAS Libya, UNIDIR, Small Arms Survey as well as guest lecturers.



Participants were empowered to become agents of change in their communities by developing their skills to deliver SALW risk education with different methods, ranging from one-on-one sessions to classrooms presentations. With support from subject matter experts,

the 12 trainees were encouraged to jointly develop risk awareness messages suitable to the Libyan context, which they have been enabled to share in their home communities.

Responding to participants' initiative and requests for material support, UNMAS Libya designed Phase 2 of the project to support them in the development and production of risk education material. During a workshop in Tunis in May 2017, participants discussed with communications and design specialists the project's visibility needs, as well as the plan to establish a national SALW awareness day in Libya, which UNMAS will support.

In parallel, based on the enthusiastic response to Phase 1, UNMAS selected a new group of 10 women under the age of 30 to undergo similar training during Phase 3 of the project. A new cohort of participants was chosen to increase the involvement of Libya's younger generations across the country, with the intent of encouraging interaction between the two groups of trainees via coordination and direct mentorship during the workshops. The 10 younger women will be participating in 3 educational workshops in Tunisia in 2017.

### **Achievement and Impact**

During Phase 1, participants collected data on SALW-related risks and behaviors from 112 individuals in their communities. This information guided the development of Libyan messages on SALW safe handling and storage practices, which participants created and disseminated on a voluntary basis. UNMAS Libya continues to monitor participants' activities, which as of June 2017 directly reached over 800 individuals and an estimated 2000 listeners via radio.



Phase 2 of the project (ongoing) led to the development of risk education brochures, posters and billboards based on participants' inputs. Such context-sensitive material will be distributed in Libya to support the continuation of SALW risk education activities. Moreover, it will increase the visibility of a national SALW awareness day, which participants decided to

organize on 16 December 2017 through several coordinated regional events. UNMAS Libya is seeking high-level endorsements for the initiative among Libyan authorities and the international community.

During Phase 3 (ongoing), UNMAS is involving a younger group of participants to engage with Libya's younger demographics. By October 2017, the group will carry out a new SALW risk perception survey that will allow for comparison with the previous results. Moreover, by December 2017 the group aims to interact with 1000 civilians through SALW risk education sessions.

Notable outcomes, in addition to transferring knowledge about SALW-related risks and best practices, include trainees reporting overcoming resistance of local authorities towards their role, and eventually receiving invitations by the same local authorities to deliver risk education sessions in public fora.

## **Somalia: Fartun Making a Difference and Inspiring Others**



*Fartun, female EOD Operator, MTT-2*

Fartun Ali Mohamud, 28, is an inspired female Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) Operator working with UNMAS mobile Multi-Tasking Team (MTT) deployed to HirShabelle State. She works under the Explosive Threat Mitigation (ETM) project supporting AMISOM troops to mitigate the threat of explosive hazard in making Somalia safe. A single mother of one, Fartun started as the Mine Risk Education (MRE) facilitator two years ago and later transferred to EOD team. She has progressed to take on a leading role in facilitating UNMAS operations. Fartun is the only female member in her team of seven male members and is setting an

example inspiring other women in her community as a role model. Since the team had to be clan diversified to gain access to hard to reach areas, she continues to fulfil a crucial role in representing one of the sub clans essential for the teams to ensure mobility. Due to the mobile nature of the team, Fartun has to travel to different sites leaving her 5-years old son behind with her mother. As a single mother, Fartun is shouldering the responsibility of her mother and son and continues to always say "**Wax walba waa suurtagal**" (everything is possible). Fartun adores her work and the team members know her as a dynamic and hardworking team player who is motivated towards making a difference.

*"I gained good knowledge and skills to contribute to explosive hazard reduction in my community and country. I earn an income and I am able to look after my family since I am a single mother. I want to keep working and so I can help my community and support my family too,"* she said.

Fartun's team was tasked to clear Lamagalay, a former military base located inside Beledweyne after Somali National Armed Forces (SNAF) identified it for military training. After hard work and toiling doing surface search, Fartun and her team cleared 224 Explosive Remnants of War (ERW) and 10kg explosive cache, and covered 210,272m<sup>2</sup>. By the end of August 2017, the military base was confirmed as clear and handed over to SNAF Commander. The SNAF Commander appreciated UNMAS effort highlighting the importance of reducing the threat of explosives hazards thereby contributing to peace enhancement processes in the region.



*Destruction of ERW found at Lamagalay*

The SNAF Commander acknowledged that the team is fully staffed with Somalis including a female team member, commenting that “..... *it is a step forward in Somalia, to see our mothers contributing to the national security.*” The cleared area is being used as a training ground since September 2017 and the Commander highlighted the plan to establish additional military barracks and administrative facilities for SNAF units while expanding the capacity of security forces in the region.



*Handover of cleared task at Lamagay*



*SNAF under training at Lamagay military base*

### **South Sudan: Women in Mine Action**

Women in South Sudan have been greatly affected by the effects of decades of conflict across the country. As men are often enrolled in armed groups, women are left with an increased burden and in charge of their households while at the same time they have become increasingly vulnerable to gender based violence. A large part of the population has been displaced, either internally (1,8 million) or into neighbouring countries (2 million), and women and girls represent the majority of those displaced.

In this context, even at its small scale, the role of mine action in empowering women is important. Mine Action operators employ over 60 women with technical skills, from database operators to community liaison officer, deminers, medics and mine clearance machine drivers. Women are also employed for camp management where the mine action teams are deployed. Below are portraits of two women working for UNMAS:

**Jurua Annet Peter (community liaison officer) and Susan Kiden Dominic (deminer)** have been working for Mine Action for several years now.

Jurua’s role is to liaise with local communities where her demining team is intervening. “We go door to door and when we arrive at a house, we introduce the team to the head of the family, we ask the family members if they know about



*Jurua Annet Peter © UNMAS/Martine Perret*

the presence of explosive hazards in the area, we provide them with safety briefs and inform how to report the presence of hazards. We give our phone number to people equipped with a cell phone and we advise the others to report to the nearest police station or NGO if they find anything. We have a very good relationship with NGOs and they provide us with a lot of information”.

Susan has been a deminer for over ten years, tirelessly “removing the threats from my land”. As for Jurua, when asked why she chose to work in mine action, she explains that she was job hunting in 2014 after having worked as administrative assistant and cleaner for different organisations. As a single mother of two children in refugee camps in Uganda, she was desperate to find any job. A demining company working for UNMAS decided to hire her because of her past experience in counselling and community liaison. Both women are, rightly, very proud of their job, knowing that by informing people and removing explosive hazards, they are saving lives. Susan adds “by removing landmines, we allow people to move freely and start cultivating again”. Since they started working for Mine Action both Jurua and Susan have travelled to many places across the country including Juba, Malakal, Wau, and Unity State. They are currently deployed in Bentiu in the north of the country where their presence is of great importance as civilians are returning to their homes after fleeing the most recent crisis in July 2016.

When asked how it is to be a woman in a men-dominated area, Susan explains, “We face absolutely no issue. We are two women in a team of 11 people and our colleagues consider us as sisters. It is really like a family. We live in well set-up tented camps where everyone gets his/her own privacy. I am not afraid of my work because I am well trained. And if I follow the procedures, there is nothing hard in my work”. Susan adds “being a women is an advantage in my role as community liaison officer because most households we visit are headed by woman and being a woman myself, I immediately get their attention.” After ten years working as a deminer, when asked if she sometimes considers changing jobs, Susan replies: “I cannot leave my work as long as there are explosive hazards in my country. I cannot leave innocent people being threatened by landmines and unexploded ordnance while I have the skills to remove them.” While some people sometimes show surprise to seeing women working in mine action, Jurua always answers, “what a man can do, a woman can do it”.



Susan Kiden Dominic clearing scrap metal during a battle area clearance of Lalob Military Barracks, north of Bentiu Town

## Abyei: Women in Mine Action

In a team composed of 13 international personnel, UNMAS Abyei counts five female contributors on professional-level field positions, all natural of Group of 77 countries.

Netsanet Habtemariam, a citizen of Eritrea, has been working with UNMAS in Abyei as an IMSMA Officer since June 2015.

Netsanet's first impression was the usual perspective of a male dominated work environment. It was not a major concern, as her expertise was Information Management, an area not particularly dominated by man and where what counts is analytical skills, giving data meaning and prioritizing tasks. However, after some time she realised any gender can do operational jobs, as long you put your heart to it.



Netsanet was nominated to participate in the Danish Church Aid (DAC) CMD EOD IMAS Level 3 Course in Skive, Denmark from 22 June to 21 July 2017.



In her view, explosive ordnance disposal – an area where women are rarely incorporated – is about perfect planning and knowing what you need to do for the desired outcome. This goes for any task and has nothing to do with gender.

The training took four intense weeks, including theory and practice, mock tasks and actual full-day field EOD tasks, where meals

and other biological needs had the lowest possible priority.

Though not experienced in disposing explosives, real scenarios were given to her and she managed to plan and successfully perform destructions. DCA, that provides very limited spaces to their courses, has praised Netsanet's performance both on Explosive Remnants of War ID tests and written documentation tests. Only two of the nine participants of the course were females and Netsanet was one of the seven to pass it and considered ready for EOD L3 Operations after a monitoring period of three months.

The DCA certification has definitely given Netsanet hands-on experience, building her confidence towards additional EOD practice and pursuing dedicated operational roles, beyond data and information management. Netsanet would like to participate more closely in



day-to-day operational tasks, transitioning to an Ops/QA role via specialized courses and more practical experience.

Other take-home benefit was that it shed a lot of light to what she was doing as IMSMA Officer, improving her professional efficiency. Now that she has learnt so much, she can independently classify ammunitions that are not in the database. She can make her own decisions in categorizing, because now she knows precisely what it is. Further, before the EOD course, UNMAS used to register how much explosives contractors used based on their own reported figures. Now she knows how much explosive is needed to destroy specific items, which puts her in a much better position to monitor and understand what is going on in the field.

In October 2017, Netsanet took part in the Security Certification Programme (SPC) training in Tripoli, Lebanon.

### **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): A short testimony of a Congolese woman EOD operator**

My name is Linda Hubertine. I am a level 2 EOD operator.

For me, demining is a hard and risky job but I did choose it. I started my training with MECHEM, UNMAS implementing partner in the DRC. I first obtained my 'Manual Mine Clearance' and 'First Aid' qualifications before validating EOD levels 1 and 2. I am very proud to have reached that position, as from now I can help to create a safe environment for people to live in. It is very important for me to feel useful and to have a positive impact on people's lives.

By conducting surveys, manual demining and EOD operations, I also contribute to the socio-economic development of my country. I hope I will stay enough longer to see my country entirely free of mines and the positive consequences of that achievement. I feel very lucky as a woman to actively participate in the changing dynamic of the DRC.